

ALLEGHENY NATIONAL FOREST

TRANSITION EIS

PART II - PRELIMINARY ALTERNATIVE OVERVIEW

On June 22, 2009, a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to authorize the use of design criteria and a site-specific review process for future proposals to develop reserved and outstanding mineral rights within the ANF, was published in the Federal Register. This NOI publication initiated a 60-day scoping period which ended on August 21, 2009. All comments received were reviewed and significant issues identified. A summary of this process can be found on the ANF website at: http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/allegHENY/projects/OGM_eis/step_2/index.php. A range of alternatives were then developed to address the significant issues identified.

The intent of this overview is to:

1. Summarize the significant issues identified;
2. Summarize the preliminary alternatives considered to address the significant issues; and
3. Explain how to understand the Part II information posted on the website.

Summary of Significant Issues

Four significant issues were identified through the public scoping process:

Significant Issue-1: There is concern that proposed development west of State Route 321 in Area 1a will adversely impact the experience at Tracy Ridge National Recreation Area and Campground.

Significant Issue-2: There is concern that the proposed development along Forest Road 454 (access road to Rimrock Overlook) and the Morrison Trail System in Area 4c will adversely impact the scenic and recreational qualities of the Rimrock Area.

Significant Issue-3: There is concern that proposed development in Area 1a has the potential to adversely impact terrestrial and aquatic wildlife and plant species caused by a reduction in key core habitat areas, loss of habitat connectivity, negative influences associated with edge effect, and stream degradation as a result of changes to water quality and/or quantity.

Significant Issue-4: There is concern that the Part II review process does not include opportunity for public involvement.

Summary of Preliminary Alternatives

Once significant issues were identified, an Interdisciplinary Team of specialists began the alternative development process to determine alternatives to be considered. Several alternatives were developed but not all alternatives will be considered in detail. The following guidelines were applied when determining which alternatives to consider in detail:

Alternatives considered in detail:

- meet the purpose and need of the project (see the NOI),
- address the significant issues, and
- are consistent with Forest Plan standards and guidelines.

Alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed study:

- do not meet the purpose and need,
- are illegal,
- are technologically impossible and/or cannot be implemented,
- are clearly unreasonable,
- cause unreasonable environmental harm,
- are remote or speculative, and/or
- are duplicative of the existing range of alternatives being considered in detail.

Alternatives Considered in Detail:

Alternative 1 – No Action: The no-action alternative must be considered in detail as required by law. *The no-action alternative for this project is to not authorize future development of reserved and outstanding mineral rights within the ANF (this is equivalent to today's existing condition).* The ANF acknowledges that it does not have the authority to deny reasonable access to reserved and outstanding mineral rights; therefore, this alternative cannot be chosen and will only serve as a baseline to compare the environmental, social, and economic effects with other alternatives being considered.

Preliminary Alternative 2: *This alternative will apply Forest Plan standards and guidelines, as identified in Alternative 3 in the Forest Plan Draft Supplemental EIS, to Part I and Part II areas in the Transition EIS.* These standards and guidelines were chosen because Alternative 3 for the Forest Plan Draft Supplemental EIS was identified as the preferred alternative. A decision on this project is expected in December 2009 (for more information go to: http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/alleggheny/projects/supp_eis/index.php).

Preliminary Alternative 3: *This alternative will apply Forest Plan standards and guidelines, as identified in Alternative 3 in the Forest Plan Draft Supplemental EIS, to Part I and Part II areas in the Transition EIS. In addition, further mitigations will be applied to address the significant issues identified through scoping (see above).*

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study:

Preliminary Alternative 4: *This alternative was identified as the proposed action for the Transition EIS, as published in the NOI on June 22, 2009.* The proposed action for the Transition EIS applied Forest Plan standards and guidelines identified in the proposed action for the Forest Plan Draft Supplemental EIS, to Part I and Part II areas. Upon completion of the Forest Plan Draft Supplemental EIS, Alternative 3 was identified as the preferred alternative, which included different standards and guidelines than the original proposed action. Therefore, this alternative would fail to meet Forest Plan standards and guidelines if the final decision, expected December 2009, for the Forest Plan Supplemental EIS is consistent with the preferred alternative currently identified. For this reason, this alternative was eliminated from detailed study.

Preliminary Alternative 5: *Applying Forest Plan standards and guidelines, as identified in Alternative 1 of the Forest Plan Draft Supplemental EIS, to Part I and Part II areas.* Alternative 1 for the Forest Plan Draft Supplemental EIS includes the standards and guidelines from the 1986 Forest Plan. Since Alternative 3 in the Forest Plan Draft Supplemental EIS has been identified as the preferred alternative, which includes different standards and guidelines than Alternative 1, this alternative would fail to meet Forest Plan standards and guidelines if the final decision, expected December 2009, for the Forest Plan Supplemental EIS is consistent with the preferred alternative currently identified. For this reason, this alternative was eliminated from detailed study.

Preliminary Alternative 6: *Part I proposals as submitted by the mineral owner without applying Forest Plan standards and guidelines.* This alternative is inconsistent with Forest Plan standards and guidelines and would not be legal and therefore was eliminated from detailed study.

Preliminary Alternative 7: *Purchasing private mineral rights below Part I and Part II areas.* This alternative is speculative and assumes that even if funds are available for purchasing, that there are willing sellers, at a reasonable price, of private mineral rights within the ANF. No site-specific information or proposal has been provided and therefore this alternative is not feasible at this time and cannot be implemented.

Preliminary Alternative 8: *Dropping all wells west of State Route 321 in the Part I – 1a Area.* This alternative fails to meet the purpose and need of providing reasonable access to reserved and outstanding mineral rights within the ANF, while minimizing surface resource impacts. For this reason, this alternative was eliminated from detailed study.

How to Understand Part II posted on the Website

To best understand Part II, we recommend that you review the process used to develop the alternatives, the explanation of what information is provided by alternative, and then pull up the map and future proposal review process. The Part II map for Alternative 2 and 3 is the same. The only difference between Alternative 2 and 3 for Part II is different questions as part of the Future Proposal Review Process for Alternative 3 that are used to address the significant issues identified above.

Process Used to Develop the Part II Map:

The Part II map development process followed several methodical steps. These steps included:

STEP-1: Define the area where future shallow well development is projected to occur within the ANF. This area was developed in the following manner: *Boundaries were delineated on a watershed level, for analysis purposes, and were determined based on the following criteria: (1) include large watersheds that cover at least 55% of oil and gas fields (as delineated by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR)); (2) include additional large watersheds with a considerable amount of existing OGD and/or projected future OGD; (3) include small watersheds that cover at least 60% of oil and gas fields (as delineated by the DCNR); and (4) include additional small watersheds with a considerable amount of existing OGD and/or projected future OGD.*

Step -2: Place wells at a 500' spacing across the Part II area defined in Step-1 using GIS (Geographic Information Systems) technology, including 500' spacing from existing wells and proposed wells included in Part I of the Transition EIS (areas involving federally-owned minerals were not included).

Step-3: Apply key Forest Plan standards and guidelines from Alternative 3 of the Forest Plan Draft Supplemental EIS, using GIS technology, to well locations determined in Step-2. The key standards and guidelines applied, which resulted in the dropping of projected well locations, included wells in riparian corridors (e.g. within 100' of a perennial stream) and wells within close proximity to heritage sites. If the projected well locations did not meet standards and guidelines, the well was dropped from further analysis.

All Forest Plan standards and guidelines were not applied because it was learned in the Part I alternative development process, that in most cases, wells could be moved or mitigations could be identified to comply with Forest Plan standards and guidelines, before concluding no surface occupancy as the final mitigation. In addition, some standards and guidelines are related to surface resources that are not constant or move (e.g. bird and other wildlife species). The standards selected were applied because they are fixed surface resources, and are not likely to change in the future. These choices were made to better ensure that the potential effects of full field development are more accurately analyzed and disclosed. Applying all Forest standards and guidelines without going well by well and road by road, as conducted in Part I, would have likely resulted in dropping more wells than necessary, causing an underestimate of the potential effects.

All future oil and gas activities will be consistent with Forest Plan standards and guidelines, as ensured by the Future Proposal Review Process.

After taking these steps, the Part II area consists of the following:

- **Overall area and wells before Steps 2 and 3:** approximately 322,000 acres and 56,139 wells
- **Overall area and wells after Steps 2 and 3:** approximately 191,000 acres and 33,360 wells

Information Provided:

- (1) Site-specific Map showing the Part II area and projected well locations, and
- (2) The Future Proposal Review Process for Alternatives 2 and 3.